

~~Falco rusticolus to the forests of the Goshawk Accipiter gentilis, from the swamps of the Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus to the mountain ranges of the Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos.~~

~~Only 9 species are resident, the rest being either partial migrants or else summer visitors. On their twice yearly journey to and from their breeding quarters large concentrations of migrating broad-wingeds are seen at Falsterbö (Sweden), at Gibraltar and at the most famous of all, the Bosphorus.~~

~~Naturally only migratory species can be observed in these Islands, and this cuts down the number of species that one can expect to meet with here. The tally is further limited by:~~

~~(a) the geographical position of the Islands, right in the centre of the Mediterranean, 60 miles S.E. of Sicily and 180 miles away from the nearest point on the African coast. This appears to be a 'long' sea-crossing to broad-winged raptors;~~

~~and (b) the known propensity of most Accipitridae to avoid long sea-crossings. However, Harriers do not seem to mind crossing large stretches of open water.~~

~~Thus Accipitridae would not be expected to be seen in any large variety or numbers, this, however, would not necessarily apply to Harriers and Falcons. Still in spite of these adverse factors, 31 species have been recorded, 11 Falconidae and 20 Accipitridae. Of this total, 12 which will be treated in a separate article are of very rare occurrence (2 are accidental for Europe),~~

~~the rest ranging from very common to rather rare;~~

~~Annually some 18 species are met with, of which 15 are regular visitors. These are the Osprey Pandion haliaetus, Honey Buzzard Pernis apivorus, all 4 European harriers Circus macrourus, C. pygargus, C. cyaneus and C. aeruginosus, Black Kite Milvus migrans, Sparrow Hawk Accipiter nisus, Hobby Falco subbuteo, Eleonora's Falcon Falco eleonora, Merlin Falco columbarius, Red-footed Falcon Falco vespertinus, Lesser Kestrel Falco naumanni, Kestrel Falco tinnunculus, and Peregrine Falco peregrinus. A Short-toed Eagle Circaetus gallicus, a few Buzzards Buteo buteo and the odd Saker Falcon Falco cherrug or two turn up in most years.~~

~~Only two species nest here, the Peregrine and the Kestrel. Peregrines formerly used to breed all around the coast as several place names indicate, e.g. Rdum il-Bies (the Peregrine's Hill) at M'Xlokk. Nowadays only two pairs breed. Kestrels used to breed commonly, even on the Valletta bastions. Now only the odd pair manages to breed. A. Schembri (Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta—1843) stated, on second hand information, that the Red Kite Milvus milvus bred on the southern sea-cliffs of Gozo. The Red Kite is an accidental species to our Islands.~~

~~These then are the raptors that one may see in Malta. Their list is not impressive, but all things considered it is quite an imposing and interesting one.~~

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## SOME NOTES ON THE WHITE WAGTAIL

J. SULTANA & C. GAUCI

The White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* (Maltese name: Zakak) generally arrives in October though stragglers may be seen as early as mid-Septem-

ber. It is a common autumn passage migrant and winter resident till March. Small numbers reappear in March and early April.

The White Wagtail can be seen in its winter plumage. The upperparts are grey with a dark patch on the nape and whitish forehead and cheeks. The underparts are white with a black band across its breast. The tail is black with contrasting white outer tail feathers. Its breeding plumage, which is assumed prior to its departure, includes a black nape, more contrasting white on the forehead and a glossy black throat.

J. Gibb's "Migrants through Malta & Gozo; October 1941—July 1945" (Brit. Birds 40:71-78) is the only ornithological contribution giving the first and last dates of appearance of species including those of the *Motacilla alba*. Our records for the years 1967-70 are hereunder compared with Gibb's:

	First dates	Last dates
J. Gibb 1941-45	Oct. 17 to Oct. 27	Apr. 3 to Apr. 7
Our records 1967-70	Sept. 12 to Oct. 9	Apr. 7 to Apr. 23

J. Gibb has also been the only contributor of a short paper on the singing of birds in Malta and Gozo (Brit. Birds 39:354-357). He writes 'No song' for this species, but we have heard individuals singing in early April at the Salt pans at Salina. The song always consisted of low warbling notes delivered in prolonged phrases. Its calls, as mentioned by Gibb, are a 'chizzik' and a one note 'zzik' frequently uttered while flying, also when flushed.

The White Wagtail has been noted to arrive singly or in flocks of up to 50. During winter it usually prefers to keep singly during the day while it forages round pools in valleys and manure heaps in farm yards, only to gather in a large flock at the roosting site, where they arrive in small parties.

It is an interesting fact that for many years the wintering White Wagtails have roosted in the trees in the Great Siege Square in Valletta. We have come to the conclusion that even those that are feeding in Gozo during the day cross the narrow channel to roost in this one particular area. We have no records of White Wagtails roosting anywhere in the islands except for two newly arrived flocks on 24th and 25th October, 1970, at Lunzjata in Gozo and five birds seen late in the evening at Ramla Valley, also in Gozo, in early April, 1970.

On these occasions we were virtually certain that they were passage migrants and not wintering birds. During the last two winters small parties were noted crossing the channel from Gozo at about 16.30 hrs. and from Malta at about 07.30 hrs. These have been noted both from the ferry boat and from vantage points at Marfa. A recovery in Valletta of a ringed bird at Lunzjata in Gozo also supports our conclusion.

Like other wintering species, the White Wagtail is also faithful to its wintering quarters. Those which succeed to make the trip to the continent and back return to the same localities. Three ringed birds have so far been recovered in the consecutive winter. The fact that the same roosting place is used year after year also supports this.

The subspecies *Motacilla alba yarelli* known as the Pied Wagtail and whose breeding range is mainly the British Isles has been reported to be

a straggler in autumn by G. Despott (Notes on the Ornithology of Malta. Ibis (10) 5:281-349, 466-526) who also gives a record for April, 1916. This subspecies differs from the nominate *M.a.alba* in having a black back and rump in the breeding season.

Wing-length and Weight of the White Wagtail (M.O.S. Ringing Group records):

The wing-length of 26 birds ranged from 83 to 92.5 mm. with an average of 87.5 mm. The weight of 20 birds ranged from 18.4 to 29 gms. with an average of 22.6 gms.

## ~~A NEW SPECIES ADDED TO THE LIST . . .~~

### ~~SOOTY FALCON~~

~~Owing to the small size and position of the Maltese Islands a large number of species in the list of birds recorded are either accidental, rare or somewhat scarce visitors. Several have been recorded only once. Two American species also figure in the list, namely the American Kestrel (M.O.S. Quarterly Bull. Vol. I No. 2: J. Sultana "The Occurrence of the American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* in Malta" and the Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* (M.O.S. Quar. Bull. Vol. II No. 4: J. Sultana & C. Gauci "Systematic List — Oct.-Dec. 1969)~~

~~Another new species to be added is the Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*. A specimen was taken at tal Harraq on 17th August, 1970. It was in the company of two other unidentified falcons.~~

~~The Sooty Falcon breeds from the Libyan Desert to the Red Sea Area. In the non-breeding season its range spreads to coastal areas of Eastern Africa and especially to Madagascar. It struggles to Mauritius and sometimes it is recorded in the Sudan and Lake Victorian Basin ("Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World" Leslie Brown and~~

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~~Dean Amadon, Vol. II).~~

~~The following is a description of the skin. The specimen is 12 ins. in length. The mantle, rump and head are dove grey, the latter slightly darker. Their feathers have thin dark shafts which are shorter and more narrowly spaced on crown and nape. It has a blackish mark under the eye which seems to merge into an inconspicuous moustachial stripe. The latter contrasts with the dirty whitish chin which merges into the grey of the breast. The rest of the underparts are also dove grey retaining some juvenile feathers on belly and flanks. These juvenile feathers are light brown, edged whitish giving it a blotchy appearance. The dark shafts are also present on the underparts and under tail coverts. The wing coverts are of a dirty brownish grey colour while the primaries and secondaries (unmoulted like the coverts) are blackish brown. The tail is also unmoulted. The two centre tail feathers are dark blackish grey; the rest are broadly striped with white on inner webs and are white tipped. It seems that the bird is in transition from immature to adult~~